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State issues draft of new contracting rule

By [JOURNAL STAFF](#)

State agencies may soon be allowed to contract out their services to private firms.

The state Legislature set the stage for the proposed rule last year with the passage of the Personnel System Reform Act. The act allows agencies to contract services "traditionally and historically provided by state employees."

The state Department of General Administration, which is responsible for developing the rules for competitive contracting, released a draft of the proposed rule on Wednesday.

The state Department of General Administration will hold five public hearings next month to collect public comments on the state's proposed competitive contracting rule.

Agencies or higher-education institutions that seek to use competitive contracting must first show that doing so will save money or improve efficiency.

In turn, state employees whose jobs will be affected are allowed to compete for contracts or offer alternatives to contracting. Affected employees will be able to submit alternatives at least 30 days before the agency begins requesting outside bids.

A spokesman for the state Department of General Administration said some positions will be exempt from contracting, including legislative branch positions, top agency managers, judges, positions on boards and commissions, state patrol and assistant attorneys general.

No specific services are being targeted for outside contracts, the

spokesman said.

Agencies must establish a contract monitoring process to measure the performance of outside contracts, and to cancel contracts that aren't up to snuff.

A key tradeoff in the state reform act was a provision that greatly expanded collective bargaining powers for the state employees union. The union will be able to bargain for wages, hours, competitive contracting protections and other items.

The proposed contracting rule is slated to go into effect in July 2005. General Administration will adopt the final rules by March 2004, after the public comment period ends.

The Seattle meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m.-12 p.m. Jan. 8, at the Seattle Monorail Project Community Room, Securities Building, 1913 Fourth Ave. Other meetings will be held in Spokane and Olympia.

The public comments period runs Jan. 8-Feb. 10. Send comments to Bill Joplin, Assistant Director, Department of General Administration, P.O. Box 41000, Olympia, WA 98504.

For more information, including the public hearing schedule, visit www.ga.wa.gov/competitivecontracting/